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Las Vegas Transit

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Las Vegas Transit

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LAS VEGAS TRANSIT SYSTEM	
BACKGROUND	
OWNER	Las Vegas Transit System Incorporated (Private)
LOCALE	Las Vegas, Nevada
TRANSIT TYPE	Bus
NUMBER OF LINES	16 (1992)
OPERATION	
BEGAN OPERATION	1965
ENDED OPERATION	Dec 1992 (residential routes), Circa April 1993 (Strip route)
OPERATOR(S)	Las Vegas Transit System Incorporated (Private)

Las Vegas Transit, also known as **Las Vegas Transit System** (LVTS), was a former operator of a small private bus system in Las Vegas, Nevada, United States.

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History

OVERVIEW

The Las Vegas Transit System took over from a previous company, Vegas Transit Lines (owned by Tanner Motor Tours of Nevada), in 1965. LVTS was owned by First Gray Line of Los Angeles, California. It was run out of the same yard as its sister operation, Las Vegas Gray Line Tours, on Industrial Rd near Charleston Blvd. Both outfits were owned by the Californians. Due to its lucrative Strip route, LVTS made significant profits for its owners. They were in business between 1965 and approximately 1993. They were bought out by the RTCSNV in early 1993 for $900,000. The Citizens Area Transit of RTCSNV officially started service in December 1992, and for a time, there were technically two public transit systems in Las Vegas until LVTS faded away. After CAT took over, LVTS only competed with CAT only on the busy and lucrative Route 6 « Strip » for several months before being bought out. The CAT system is now known as RTC Transit.

1960S–1970S

LVTS actually ran a frequent and efficient service for many years during the 1960s and 1970s when the city was small; their routes covered most of the city. At the time, they were considered a vast improvement over its predecessor, Vegas Transit Lines. In fact, they were praised as a self-sufficient bus system in the 1970s, as in an article written in Bus World Magazine in 1978. In about 1975, LVTS experimented with a « grid » route system replacing the former « hub and spoke » system. However, by all accounts, it was disastrous and ridership plummeted. They then went back to the old hub and spoke route system and enjoyed an increase in ridership, as detailed in the 1978 magazine article. In the late 1970s, the system consisted of 9 routes, 1-10, w/ Rte #2 missing. There were actually 3 24-hour routes: Route 3 Salt Lake Hwy, 4 Boulder Hwy, and 6 The Strip. Routes 3, 4, and 9 had 30-minute headways and #6 « Strip » had 15-minute headways. All routes at that time connected downtown for « an easy » transfer. Unfortunately, the routes were not synchronized to meet at the same time and sometimes, a rider may have to wait up to 45mins for transfer to the next bus. This situation occurred until the early 1980s, when the routes were all finally synchronized to arrive/depart at the same time, except for the frequently running route 6. As in later decades, the Strip route provided the money for the other money losing residential routes and allowed a profit for the small private transit company. It should be noted that being a successful private bus company is an exceptional feat, as by the 1960s, virtually all transit systems in the US had been taken over by municipal governments due to declining riderships and heavily subsidized by taxpayer dollars.

In the 1978, LVTS had a total of 26 buses, with half of them less than 5 yrs old. During the 1976–1977 years, ridership went up 21.8%. Bus fare was $0.75 for one ride, although most commuters bought commuter cards of 10 rides for less than 1/2 that price per ride. The bus schedule was actually more frequent in the 1970s, with several routes running 24 hour service and several with 30 min headways. This is in stark contrast to the next decade, when the only 24 hour service was on the Route 6, and almost all residential routes had headways of 60 mins or greater. During the mid 1970s, the livery changed from a crazy color scheme of multi-color all-over with cartoonish faces (e.g. bus fronts painted w/ lips and a tongue sticking out or grinning teeth) to a more conservative and professional livery of a belt line deep orange/orange/yellow with « Las Vegas Transit » in large letters. This more professional paint scheme lasted until the end of transit operation in the 1990s. LVTS favored the GMC New Looks and had a 100% GMC fleet from 1965 until 1982, when the Grumman Flxible 870s came along.

1980S–1990S

By the 1980s and early 1990s, the private bus system was becoming way too small and did not have the service frequency or route coverage for the explosive growth of the Las Vegas Valley. According to Las Vegas Review Journal articles at the time, LVTS claimed that without any government subsidies, they could not expand the coverage area or increase frequency of service. They contended the only way for them to support the approximately dozen residential routes that they ran was due to the highly lucrative Route 6, « Strip », which generated the profit to support the rest of the system. The small coverage area made it extremely difficult for people to use the buses, and mostly the poor and elderly, who had no means of private transportation, would ride the bus. LVTS ran the residential routes, numbering about 12 when they went out of business in 1992/93 and the lucrative Route 6 « Strip/Downtown » along w/ a « Strip Shuttle » and « Strip Express » service. The residential routes usually consisted of hourly to 1½ hour headways, running from about 5:30 AM to 10:00 PM. Most residential routes still convened Downtown using the « spoke and hub » route structure, and by the early 1980s, all routes convening downtown are synchronized for same departure to facilitate passenger transfer.

In the 1980s, LVTS did added approximately 4 new routes, Rte #2 « North Las Vegas », Rte 6A « Sam's Town/Strip », Rte 11 « Henderson », and Rte 12 « Spring Valley ». They also added a Rte 13 « Strip Shuttle », which benefited mostly the tourists on the Strip by allowing them to visit the Las Vegas Hilton and the Convention Center. In the very late 1980s and early 1990s, they also added a Rte 14 « Mall Hopper » and a « Strip Express ». However, overall, it was too little and too late. In fact, they were voted as the worst transit system in the country during one year in the 1980s! The city had outgrew the small private transit

system. After the taxpayers of Clark County approved a tax subsidy for transit in the mid 1980s, LVTS's days were numbered. The city was just too big for LVTS and it was unrealistic for the city to expect a private bus company, without a taxpayer subsidy, to expand and run throughout the city based on its Strip revenue. They were providing a public service, but they were also out to make a buck.

In the 1980s and 1990s, even though the Route 6 « Strip » route was the busiest and buses were packed with tourists, the route was run with some of the oldest equipment, including some of the short and narrow, 35 ft long × 96 in wide, fishbowls. Non-working A/C, on these buses was an ongoing problem. By contrast, some of the residential routes, with few passengers, were run by the newest buses, which were city-owned, 40 ft long × 102 in wide, Grumman 870s and Gillig Phantoms. One reason for this was the city mandated that the city-owned buses, which also had handicap accessibility, run on the residential areas.[*citation needed*]

TRANSIT OPERATION

After the route schedules were synchronized in the 1980s and onward, the residential routes were run by two shifts of drivers, a morning and a swing shift. There were hourly non-service on the residential routes during mid morning, and early evenings, when the drivers took their meals. There was also an hour service interruption during mid afternoon when there was the shift change. Las Vegas Transit riders sometimes had up to 2–4 hours of travel times to get from Point A to B, if they were caught between these break times, as most trips required a transfer downtown. Currently, with the grid system of routes and more buses run by CAT, getting from A to B is shorter, especially with the higher frequency of runs.

In terms of equipment, LVTS from 1964 to about 1981, ran mostly all fishbowl buses, see GM New Look (Fishbowl) Bus. In 1981, they received five GMC RTS (Rapid Transit Series) buses bought by the city of Las Vegas, and in 1982, they received 12 Grumman Flxible 870s from the city as well. The Grumman 870s were used mostly on the residential routes, perhaps required by the city. The RTSs and Grumman 870s were handicap accessible, while the fishbowls were not. When the Grumman 870s broke down on a residential route, it was usually substituted by a RTS or old fishbowl. Handicap passengers were told on their printed schedules to call ahead of time regarding availability of a handicapped bus. The old buses, mostly the « fishbowls » from 1960s to the 1970s, were run on the Route 6 « Strip », along with the RTSs. This route ran between downtown and going as far south on Las Vegas Blvd (the « Strip) as the old Hacienda hotel. By the 1980s, many of these older buses had non-working air conditioning, and ran with open windows packed with tourists on the extremely crowded Strip route. During peak hours of the day, the Strip buses were jam packed and often had to pass passengers waiting at the bus stops. Usually, the air-conditioned RTSs were also assigned to the Strip route. But, the majority were still the older fishbowl buses. Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, LVTS bought a few more newer air-conditioned buses, mostly TMC RTSs, to alleviate the problem. In 1990, the city bought another 11 Gillig Phantom 40-foot transit buses, which replaced the Grummans 870s. Some of these 870s were then also relegated to the busy Route 6 and they must have been a welcome relief as they usually had working air conditioners. However, the 870s were also used required in some residential routes as replacement buses for broken-down Gilligs and also as second buses on some of the busier routes, such as Rte 3, « Salt Lake Highway » and Rte 10 « University ». These two routes required two buses during peak morning and afternoon hours. Also, the Rte 1 « Hyde Park », often needed an extra bus for 2nd runs. Strangely enough,[*according to whom?*] LVTS never published a time schedule for this 2nd run bus on the « Hyde Park » route. It just ran half hour apart from the regularly scheduled bus. One reason may be there was not enough rider to require a dedicated secondary bus and LVTS truly did not want to commit a second bus on the Rte 1 on published schedules.

LVTS also experimented with a couple of new routes in the its last years of service, one called the « Mall Hopper », which required two air-conditioned buses to work the three major malls in Las Vegas at the time. Starting in the early 1990s, LVTS also started buying a few used and new RTSs for its Strip service, again with working air conditioners. But, even then, because of the large number of buses required to service the busy Strip route, workhorses of the Strip fleet continued to be the good old, reliable fishbowl buses, some that were over 20 years old. In fact, LVTS ran some of the oldest buses in the USA.[*citation needed*] Because of criticism from the newspapers and city about the old, non-air conditioned buses, LVTS did fix the air-conditioning on many of the old fishbowls. In 1991, LVTS also bought four New Flyer D60HF articulated buses to run as « Strip Express » with limited stops between downtown and several points on the Strip. These were used by both tourist and casino workers. There were also five MCI MC5C buses bought used by LVTS after their service in Saudi Arabia. These MC5Cs were designed with double roofs due to the hot Saudi desert sun, and thus, worked very well for the hot Las Vegas sun. They were designed to run on the « Strip Shuttle », which operated between the Las Vegas Hilton and the rest of the Strip hotels and the route consisted of Las Vegas Blvd South and Paradise Rd, where the Las Vegas Convention Center and Las Vegas Hilton are located. In addition, six elderly RTS-01 buses also came in 1991 from San Jose, California in an effort to get « newer » equipment on the by-then seriously overcrowded Strip route.

After Citizens Area Transit took over the residential routes in 1992, the company did not want to give up its lucrative Strip route. The city-owned buses (Grumman 870s, GMC RTSs, and Gillig Phantoms) had to be returned and were given to CAT. However, LVTS still had their old Fishbowls, the articulated New Flyers, MC5C's, and some RTSs of their own. These were used to run on the Strip until 1993 before LVTS mostly ceded the Strip to CAT. What service remained, along with a few buses, was taken over by the affiliated Las Vegas Gray Line, which continued operating for decades afterward. Eventually taken over by Coach USA and renamed Transportation Unlimited, operation of the route finally ended in 2004, being conducted with six ex Stockton CA RTSs at the end.

COMPETITION AND FIGHTING WITH CAT

When CAT started running their buses in Dec 1992, LVTS dropped all their residential routes but clung onto their « cash cow », Route 6, « Strip ». They competed head to head w/ CAT on the Strip from Dec 1992 until about April or May 1993, when they were bought out by the RTC for $900,000. The cash fare was $1.25 for a LVTS ride and $1.00 for a CAT ride at the time. Obviously, there was a conscientious effort by CAT to undercut Las Vegas Transit and speed its demise.

LVTS's general manager, Barry Perea, fought to keep LVTS in business and was a big opponent to the formation of CAT, orchestrated by RTC chairman Bruce Woodbury after Clark County voters approved a quarter cent sales tax increase in 1990 to fund a public transit system. Perea's opposition was understandable. LVTS was around when the city and its citizens were not interested in a publicly funded transit system. He was a businessman and was only trying to protect the business that he worked so hard to build over the years.

LVTS at its end, had a fleet of 45 buses, 30 of them leased from the city, including 5 GMC RTSs from 1980, 12 Grumman Flxibles from 1983, and 13 Gillig Phantoms from 1991.

Fares

In 1978, the cash fare was $0.75 with no charge for transfers.

In August, 1987 published fares were increased to $1.00 for adults and $0.15 for transfers.

In November, 1991 fares were changed to $1.25 for adults, with transfers remaining at $0.15.

Routes

ROUTES IN 1978

9 routes(total 26 buses in fleet); All routes originate from downtown; Not all routes are synchronized for same time departure.

- 1 Hyde Park (60 min headway, 14 runs/day, 1 bus)
- 3 Salt Lake Hwy (24 hour service, 27 runs/day, 4 buses)
- 4 Boulder Hwy (24 hour service, 27 runs/day, 4 buses)
- 5 Huntridge (60 min headway, 14 runs/day, 1 bus)
- 6 Strip (15 min headway, 78 runs/day, 6-10 buses)
- 7 College Park (45 min headway, 20 runs/day, 1 bus)
- 8 Golfridge (60 min headway, 14 runs/day, 1 bus)
- 9 Vegas Heights (30 min headway, 20 runs/day, 2 buses)
- 10 University (60 min headway, 13 runs/day, 1 bus)

ROUTES IN 1992

16 routes; Based on a 11/1991 published schedule; Downtown routes since the 1990s are synchronized for same time departure, Routes 6A, 11, 12, 13 and 14 do not go downtown.

- 1 Hyde Park (Approx hourly service, 13 runs/day, 7 days/wk, required 1 bus)
- 2 North Las Vegas (Approx hourly service, 10 runs/day, 19 runs/day, No service Sundays/Holidays, required 1 bus)
- 3 Salt Lake Highway (30 min headways during AM/PM peak, Hourly otherwise, 7 days/wk, required 2 buses during peaks)
- 4 Boulder Highway (Approx hourly service, 13½ runs/day, 7 days/wk, 1 bus)
- 5 Huntridge (Approx hourly service, 13 runs/day, 7 days/wk, 1 bus)
- 6 Strip (7 days/wk, 24 hour service, required many buses, with published frequency of every 15mins during the day, but often more frequent)
- 6A Sam's Town/Strip (Approx hourly service, runs/day, No Sunday/Holiday service, 1 bus)
- 7 College Park (Approx hourly service, 13 runs/day, 7 days/wk, 1 bus)
- 8 Golfridge (Approx hourly service, 13 runs/day, 7 days/wk, 1 bus)
- 9 Vegas Heights (Approx hourly service, 13 runs/day, 7 days/wk, 1 bus)
- 10 University (30 mins headway during peak AM/PM hrs, 18½ runs/day, 7 days/wk, required 2 buses max)
- 11 Henderson (Approx hourly service, 10 runs/day, No Sunday/Holiday service, 1 bus)
- 12 Spring Valley (Approx hourly service, 11¾ runs/day, No Sunday/Holiday service, 1 bus)
- 13 Strip Shuttle (7 days/wk, frequency about every 20 mins, required several buses, usually ran by the used MCI MC5Cs)
- 14 Mall Hopper (No Sunday service, 2 buses)
- « Strip Express » (ran by 4 New Flyer articulated buses with limited stops between the Strip and downtown)

ROUTE STRUCTURE

Las Vegas Transit's route structure in most of the 1970s, and throughout the 1980s and early 1990s until closing, was a « spoke and hub » system, similar to a wagon wheel. The « hub » was downtown Las Vegas. This was in contrast to most major and even smaller cities, which generally use a « grid » system, as CAT currently does, or a combination of the « grid » and « spoke and hub » system. The reason LVTS used the « hub and spoke » system was simply to maximize coverage of area with less buses needed. Instead of having a bus run up and down the same street, most of LVTS routes were designed in big loops and even sub-

loops circling a section of the city before returning downtown. This method maximized the service area covered. Furthermore, it allowed riders to go to more places, as a rider can access most other routes via the downtown hub. However, it inconvenienced bus riders, who must often circle the whole route before arriving at their destination, most times requiring a transfer downtown as well. Almost all its routes convened downtown, the exceptions being Routes 6A, 11, 12, 13, and 14. Only 3 routes, #3, #4, and #6, ran up and down one particular street for its whole route. For a small bus system, LVTS must be given credit for maximizing the service area provided. They did try hard to provide bus service with what they had.

Bus Roster

1965–1992. It is mostly complete, with a few missing buses.

RAPID TRANSIT SERIES RTS

- Bus #4521-4525 GMC RTS-04, Delivered new 11/80 (Las Vegas city owned), later transferred to Citizens Area Transit renumbered 101-105
- Bus #4401-4403 GMC RTS-04 models from 1983–84, acquired used in 1991 from Southwest Coaches (San Diego CA) 101-103 for Strip service, later sold to Citizens Area Transit renumbered 150-152
- Bus #4301-4302 TMC RTS-06, Delivered new in 9/92 for Strip service, later sold to Citizens Area Transit renumbered 153-154
- Bus #4541-4546 GMC TH8201 (RTS-01, from 9/78) acquired used 1991 from Santa Clara County (San Jose CA) 1002,1012,1031,1037,1039,1058 for Strip service

GRUMMAN FLXIBLE

- Bus #4601-4612 Model 870 (owned by City of Las Vegas), Delivered 8/82, later transferred to Citizens Area Transit renumbered 254-261, 250-253

GILLIG PHANTOM

- Bus #4701-4713, Delivered 1991 (owned by city of Las Vegas), later transferred to Citizens Area Transit renumbered 301-313

NEW FLYER D60HF

- Bus #6101-6104 articulated buses, Delivered 1991 for « Strip Express » route, later sold to Citizens Area Transit renumbered 500-503

GM NEW LOOK (FISHBOWL) BUS

35 feet length

- Bus #4500-4511 1960 TDH4517 502-512, 516 ex Oklahoma City 701-711,715 (not in order), acquired for start of LVTS service in 1965

- Bus #4550-4551 Delivered 11/65 TDH4519 899-900 later renumbered 4510-4511 in 1977
- Bus #4552-4553 Delivered 5/69 T6H4521A 331-332 later renumbered 4512-4513 in 1977
- Bus #4554 Delivered 7/71 T6H4521A 739 later renumbered 4514 in 1977
- Bus #4555-4556 Delivered 7/73 T6H4523A 505-506 later renumbered 4515-4516 in 1977

- Bus #4517-4520 1969 T6H4521A 248-251 ex Sun Valley Bus Lines 401-404(Phoenix), acquired 1977
- Bus #4531-4535 1972-73 T6H4523A 022-023,031,411,418 ex-Tucson, AZ 7202,7203,7211,7312,7319 acquired in 1987 for « Strip » bus service

40 feet length

- Bus #5301-5304 Delivered 2/68 T6H5306A 011-014 later renumbered 5371-5374 in 1977
- Bus #5305 Delivered 7/71 T6H5306A 865 later renumbered 5375 in 1977
- Bus #5306-5307 Delivered 10/74 T8H5308A 221-222 later renumbered 5376-5377 in 1977
- Bus #5308-5309 Delivered 9/76 T8H5308A 449-450 later renumbered 5378-5379 in 1977

MCI MC5C

- Bus #4536-4540 -2 door Highway buses bought used 1991 from Greyhound-Taseco (Saudi Arabian operations) 2021, unknown, 2060, 2094, unknown. They were used mostly on the « Strip shuttle » route, although occasionally making forays into the residential routes when the regular bus broke down.

Gallery

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A 1974 GMC fishbowl working the busy Route 6 « Strip » loading in Downtown for the Strip run. These fishbowls were the main workhorses of the Strip bus fleet up until the end of LVTS operations. This route was the « cash cow » that supported the whole system. Photo is circa late 1980s (1988?)

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- Published LVTS Route Schedule from 11/1991

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